

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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R 291154Z MAR 77
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AMEMBASSY CAIRO
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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 2183

EXDIS

E. GDS
TAGS: PFOR, IS
SUBJECT: U.S.-ISRAELI RELATIONS AFTER THE RABIN VISIT

SUMMARY: ISRAELI-U.S. RELATIONS HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY STATEMENTS ABOUT OUR MIDDLE EAST POLICY MADE DURING THE RABIN VISIT TO WASHINGTON AND SUBSEQUENTLY. THESE STATEMENTS ARE NOW SEEN AS A PART OF A CALCULATED PLAN TO GET SOME PROGRESS ON THE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION. RABIN HAS ANNOUNCED THAT AN ISRAELI PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN WILL BE REQUIRED IN THE U.S. AS THERE WERE ISSUES ON WHICH THE TWO COUNTRIES DID NOT SEE EYE-TO-EYE. HE HAS BEEN JOLTED BY A NUMBER OF BLOWS THIS YEAR AND THE WASHINGTON VISIT DID NOT BRING THE "LIFT" HE HAD HOPED FOR. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES HIS TACTIC SEEMS TO BE TO HOLD THE LINE UNTIL THE MAY ELECTIONS AND BARGAIN VIGOROUSLY THEREAFTER. NEVERTHELESS, THE BASIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE U.S. HAS NOT BEEN ERODED ALTHOUGH THERE IS CONTINUING NERVOUSNESS IN ISRAEL AS TO WHAT THE FUTURE MIGHT BRING. END OF SUMMARY.

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1. THE MONTH OF MARCH HAS BEEN A TURBULENT ONE AS FAR AS ISRAELI-U.S. RELATIONS ARE CONCERNED. IT BEGAN WITH THE RABIN VISIT TO WASHINGTON, WHICH THE PRIME MINISTER HAD SO AVIDLY DESIRED AND ON WHICH HE SET SUCH STORE. IT IS ENDING WITH THE SECRETARY'S VISIT IN MOSCOW, WITH THE ISRAELIS APPREHENSIVELY WATCHING FOR SIGNS OF ANY COMING TOGETHER OF THE U.S. AND SOVIET POSITIONS ON THE

MIDDLE EAST.

2. MEANWHILE, THE ISRAELI BODY POLITIC HAS BEEN SUFFERING A SERIES OF WHAT CAN ONLY BE CALLED "SHOCKS": "DEFENSIBLE BORDERS;" "RETURN TO THE 1967 BORDERS;" "PALESTINIAN HOMELAND;" AND THE VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS AND MISINTERPRETATIONS IN THE PRESS RELATING TO PROFESSOR BRZEZINSKI'S DISCUSSION WITH AMBASSADOR DINITZ.

3. FROM ALL OF THESE, ISRAELI OBSERVERS HAVE DRAWN THE CONCLUSION THAT A NEW WIND IS BLOWING (CALL IT A MARCH WIND, IF YOU WILL) WHICH MAY PORTEND SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THEIR HITHERTO RELATIVELY COMFORTABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE U.S. THERE IS AN AIR OF BEWILDERMENT AS THE ISRAELIS TRY TO FIGURE OUT WHAT THIS NEW WIND WILL MEAN FOR THEM, AND WHETHER IT WILL BE STRONG ENOUGH TO FORCE THEM TO DO THINGS THEY ARE REALLY NOT INTERESTED IN DOING. UPON REFLECTION, IT IS NOW GENERALLY ASSUMED THAT THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENTS ON THE MIDDLE EAST WERE BY NO MEANS HAPHAZARD BUT WERE CAREFULLY PLANNED TO ACHIEVE A CERTAIN EFFECT, AND THE ISRAELIS ARE NOT AT ALL SURE THAT THEY WILL LIKE THIS EFFECT. AT THE SAME TIME THERE APPEARS TO BE A FEELING OF "DEJA VU" AMONG SOME ISRAELI OFFICIALS WHO LET IT BE KNOWN THAT THE NEW WIND FROM WASHINGTON IS NOTHING UNUSUAL WITH THE CHANGE OF U.S. ADMINISTRATIONS. ONE MFA OFFICER COMMENTED TO US THAT, WHILE THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENTS SHOULD NOT BE IGNORED, HE WAS SURE THAT "REALITY WOULD RETURN AFTER 100 DAYS." THE REACTION OF THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT TO THE NEW SIGNALS
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FROM WASHINGTON WILL PROBABLY INCLUDE THEIR JUDGMENT THAT, TO A CERTAIN EXTENT, THE CALLS FOR ACTION AND FOR EARLY MOVES TO NEGOTIATION ARE PART OF THE ATTEMPT TO SWEEP CLEAN WITH A NEW BROOM.

4. AS IN ANALOGOUS SITUATIONS IN THE PAST, THE IMMEDIATE REACTION HAS BEEN TO CONSIDER WHAT PRESSURES CAN BE APPLIED TO GET U.S. POSITIONS CHANGED WHICH MIGHT NOT BE ACCEPTABLE (OR IN SOME CASES EVEN AGREEABLE) TO ISRAEL. FOR HIS PART, RABIN HAS ANNOUNCED THAT A MAJOR PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN WILL BE NECESSARY IN THE U.S., A CAMPAIGN WHICH WILL APPARENTLY BE WAGED TO PERSUADE THE AMERICAN PUBLIC, CONGRESS, AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS TO PUT SUFFICIENT PRESSURE ON THE GOVERNMENT SO AS TO EFFECT CHANGES IN POLICIES OR PRACTICES WHICH ARE CONSIDERED POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS BY ISRAEL. IT DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE BEEN WIDELY RECOGNIZED HERE THAT THIS IS A TECHNIQUE WHICH CAN BOOMERANG. IT IS, OF COURSE, UP TO THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT TO DECIDE WHAT THE PRICE WILL

BE FOR EACH COUNTER ACTION IT TAKES, BUT IT IS PROBABLY EVIDENT TO THAT GOVERNMENT THAT A PRICE WILL HAVE TO BE PAID. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF AN INFORMATION CAMPAIGN IN THE U.S. ALSO SERVES TO MEET A DOMESTIC ISRAELI NEED. OFFICIALS HAVE TOLD US THAT THE GOVERNMENT UNDERSTANDS THAT ISRAELI RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. REMAIN FIRM AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS NO FEARS ABOUT ANY LESSENING OF THE U.S. COMMITMENT TO THE SUPPORT OF ISRAEL; HOWEVER, THEY BELIEVE THAT ISRAELI PUBLIC OPINION IS CRITICAL OF RECENT U.S. ADMINISTRATION STATEMENTS REGARDING THE MIDDLE EAST AND FEARS THAT U.S. SUPPORT OF ISRAEL HAS LESSENNED. THIS FEELING IS, OF COURSE, HEIGHTENED BY INTENSE ISRAELI PRESS COVERAGE AND OF COMMENT ABOUT EVERY NUANCE OF ISRAELI/U.S. RELATIONS AS EXPRESSED BY THE NEW ADMINISTRATION.

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5. UPON HIS RETURN, RABIN WAS CANDID IN ADMITTING THAT THERE WERE ISSUES ON WHICH THE U.S. AND ISRAEL DID NOT SEE EYE-TO-EYE; HE MADE THIS CLEAR BY REPEATING THAT ISRAEL WOULD NEVER RETURN TO ITS 1967 BORDERS. HOWEVER, HE APPARENTLY DECIDED THAT, WHATEVER HIS TRUE FEELINGS, THE BEST WAY FOR HIM TO PLAY THE VISIT TO WASHINGTON WOULD BE TO HIGHLIGHT ITS SUCCESSES. HE THEREFORE DREW ATTENTION TO THE ISSUES ON WHICH ISRAEL AND THE U.S. WERE AGREED: THE PRESERVATION OF A STRONG AND SECURE ISRAEL; THE DEFINITION OF PEACE; AND THE FACT THAT THE PLO WOULD NOT BE A PARTICIPANT IN THE GENEVA TALKS UNTIL IT HAD RECOGNIZED ISRAEL. (THE TURE ISRAELI

POSITION IS THAT THE PLO IS NOT A SUITABLE PARTNER FOR TALKS UNDER ANY CONDITIONS.) HE PLAYED DOWN THE BORDER AND PALESTINIAN ISSUES. HE ALSO DID NOT DRAW ATTENTION TO THE FACT THAT HE HAD HAD RELATIVELY LITTLE SUCCESS WITH BILATERAL ISSUES ON HIS VISIT. IN A SIMILAR VEIN, FOREIGN MINISTER ALLON REJECTED ON MARCH 26 THE CHARGES THAT RABIN'S VISIT WAS NOT SUCCESSFUL. HE SAID THAT U.S. ADMINISTRATION STATEMENTS ABOUT ISRAEL ARE MORE POSITIVE THAN STATEMENTS MADE IN THE PAST, EXCEPT ON THE ISSUE OF
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BORDERS AND, EVEN THERE, THE U.S. ADMINISTRATION NOW RECOGNIZES THE NEED FOR DEFENSIBLE BORDERS. ALLON ALSO SAID THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO EROSION IN U.S./ISRAELI RELATIONS, WHICH WERE "AS SOUND AND CORRECT AS ALWAYS."

6. BY ALL ACCOUNTS RABIN'S REPORT TO THE CABINET OF HIS TALKS IN WASHINGTON WAS A SOMBER ONE. THE VISIT HE HAD SO MUCH WANTED HAD OBVIOUSLY NOT GIVEN HIM THE HOPE FOR "LIFT" WHICH WOULD HELP CARRY HIM TO ELECTORAL SUCCESS IN MAY. BEFORE THE PRESS OR PUBLIC HAD FINISHED DIGESTING THE RABIN VISIT CAME THE NEWS OF MRS. RABIN'S ILLEGAL BANK ACCOUNT IN WASHINGTON. EVEN THE PRIME MINISTER'S SUBSEQUENT STATEMENT THAT IT WAS A JOINT ACCOUNT AND THAT HE WAS AS MUCH TO BLAME AS HIS WIFE (AS STORY NOT UNIVERSALLY BELIEVED) DID LITTLE TO REMOVE THE SOUR TASTE OF THAT INCIDENT. COMING ON TOP OF THE OFER AND YADLIN AFFAIRS, IT COULD ONLY INCREASE THE PRIME MINISTER'S DISCOMFORT. ADD TO THIS THAT HIS VISIT WAS NOT SEEN AS A GREAT SUCCESS FOR ISRAEL, AND IT IS APPARENT THAT MARCH WAS NOT AN UP-BEAT MONTH FOR HIM.

7. HOWEVER, THE PRIME MINISTER IS A DOUGHTY FIGHTER AND HAS NOT BEEN DIVERGED FROM HIS GOAL OF COMING OUT OF THE ELECTION IN A POSITION TO FORM THE NEXT GOVERNMENT. ALMOST AS IF TO BELIEVE THE POINTS NOTED ABOVE, THE LATEST POLLS SHOW THAT THE ALIGNMENT UNDER RABIN HAS ACTUALLY INCREASED ITS PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTE, BUT MOST OBSERVERS FEEL THAT THESE POLLS, WITH THEIR INEVITABLE TIME LAG, ARE NOT A TRUE REFLECTION OF THE POSITION TODAY. FOR ONE THING, DESPITE HIS OTHER STRONG QUALITIES, RABIN HAS NOT BEEN GIVING FIRM LEADERSHIP IN THE ECONOMIC SECTOR. HE HAS IN FACT BEEN CREATING THE IMPRESSION OF GIVING IN TO ALMOST EVERY DEMAND OF THE UNIONS. ALL PRETENSE OF RATIONAL ECONOMIC PLANNING OR STRATEGY HAS BEEN WASHED AWAY, AT LEAST UNTIL A NEW
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GOVERNMENT IS FORMED.AND YET THE DRUM ROLL OF STRIKES
CONTINUES AND GIVES NO SIGN OF ABATING.

8. FACED WITH THESE PROBLEMS, RABIN'S TACTIC SEEMS TO
BE TO HOLD THE LINE AND NOT MAKE ANY REAL CONCESSION
IN THE FOREIGNPOLICY FIELD NOR TO CONFRONT HIS OWN
LABOR UNION CONSTITUENCY UNTIL AFTER THE MAY ELECTIONS.
FOLLOWING THE ELECTIONS, AND PROVIDED HE IS IN A
POSITION TO FORM THE GOVERNMENT, RABIN MIGHT BARGAIN
IN THE HARD MANER WE BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH N 1975,
POSSIBLY BEGINNING DURING THE SECRETARY'S EXPECTED
SUMMER VISIT HERE. IF THIS IS SUCCESSFUL FROM HIS
POINT OF VIEW,HE COULD TELL THE ISRAELI PEOPLE THAT HE
HAD WRUNG CONCESSIONS FOR THEM AND THAT, KNOWNING HIS
REPUTATION AS ANASTUTE BARGAINER, THEY COULD ACCEPT
THE PACKAGE HE HAD TO OFFER THEM - AT A MINIMUM A
WILLINGNESS TO GO TO GENEVA ON TERMS HE MIGHT NOT NOW
BE ABLE TO ACCEPT.IN ESSENCE THIS IS WHAT HE DID AT
THE END OF SINAI II, WHICH MANY CONSIDERED WOULD NOT
HAVE BEENPOSSIBLE IN AUGUST IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR THE
BREAKDOWN OF THE NEGOTIATIONS IN MARCH. WHETHER WE
WILL HAVE TO GO THROUGH THE UNPLEASANT EXERCISE AGAIN
IS DEBATABLE; RABIN, HOWEVER, CERTAINLY RECALLS THAT
HIS POPULARITY REACHED NEW PEAKS BOTH WHEN THE SAID "NO"
TO THE AMERICANS IN MARCH AND WHEN HE SAID "YES" TO
THEM IN AUGUST. IF HE SHOULD FOLLOW THIS TACTIC AGAIN
HE WOULD PROBABLY BE MAKING NEGATIVE NOISES TO US UNTIL
AFTER ELECTION DAY. OTHER SCENARIOS ARE OF COURSE
POSSIBLE: THE ELECTION COULD RESULT IN A WEAKER RABIN
GOVERNMENT OR A COALITION LED BY A NON-LABOR PRIME
MINISTER WHO WOULD LIKELY BE MORE HAWKISH ON THE
TERRITORIAL QUESTION IN EITHER CASE THE PROSPECTS
FOR GENEVA WOULD BE BLEAK. IN THAT CONNECTION, IT
SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THE LIKUD (AND OTHER PARTIES AS
WELL) WILL BE WATCHING CLOSELY FOR ANY ACTION OR STATE-
MENTBY THE U.S. WHICH THEY WOULD CONSIDER TO BE

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"INTERFERENCE" IN THE ISRAELI ELECTIONS.IN AN ELECTION
CAMPAIGN AS INTENSE AS THIS ONE,WHEN FOREIGN AFFAIRS
AND NATIONAL SECURITY WILL LIKELY BE MAJOR ISSUES AND
THE U.S. IS INEVITABLY CENTRAL TO ISRAEL'S POLICIES IN
THOSE FIELDS, VIRTUALLY AN U.S. STATEMENT OR ACTION
CAN TRIGGER CHARGES OF SUCH INTERFERENCE.

9. THE SHOCKS WHICH THE U.S.-ISRAELI RELATIONSHIP HAVE
SUFFERED THIS MONTH WILL NOT BE FATAL BUT THEY DO MEAN

THAT OUR RELATIONSHIP WILL PROBABLY NOT BE THE SAME AGAIN FOR SOME TIME, PROBABLY UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTIONS. THE FACT THAT THE PRESIDENT HAS CHOSEN TO MENTION THE UNMENTIONABLE (FINAL BORDERS) WILL HAVE A CONTINUING EFFECT HERE, AS WILL HIS COMMENT ABOUT A HOMELAND FOR THE PALESTINIANS. BOTH OF THESE ARE ISSUES WHICH THE ISRAELIS WOULD LIKE TO FENCE FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE. ON THE OTHER HAND, RELATIONS BETWEEN THE U.S. AND ISRAEL ARE DEEP AND MANY DIMENSIONAL. THEY ARE NOT EASILY ERODED. THE ESSENCE OF THE RELATIONSHIP HAS NOT CHANGED DURING THIS MONTH BUT THE FEAR HERE AT THIS TIME IS THAT IT MAY BE EVOLVING TO THE DISADVANTAGE OF ISRAEL. HENCE THE TREPIDATION WITH WHICH THE ISRAELIS WAIT FOR THE RESULTS OF THE MIDDLE EAST TALKS IN MOSCOW AND WASHINGTON AND THE NERVOUSNESS WITH WHICH THEY SCRUTINIZE EVERY STATEMENT BY THE ADMINISTRATION DUNNIGAN

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